

## Jockeying for 'Wright' Position

By KEITH L. MARTIN

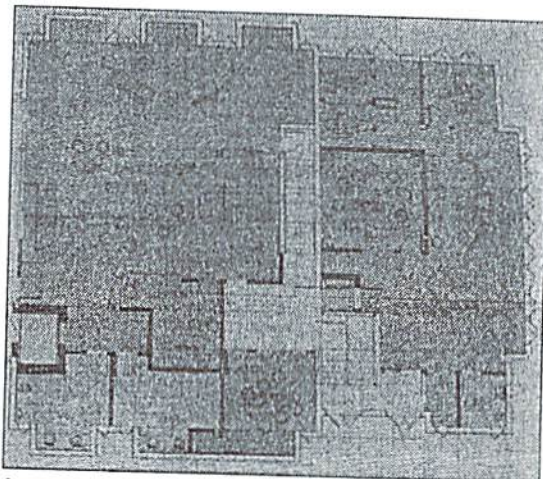
Before the Board of Selectmen made their recommendation for the use of a renovated Wright Building, the two parties vying for space in the back portion of the building put in their final pitches at a forum on Thursday.

While the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society is set to occupy 2,235-square-feet of the front part of the building for miscellaneous archival storage and a reading room, space in the back portion of the building was still up in the air. In October and again on Thursday, architect Ron Roberge of Finegold Alexander and Associates presented two options to the town to use the rear section of the building: one with the Student Union occupying the entire property and another where the town's Recreation Department would get 1,281-square-feet of the space for their offices.

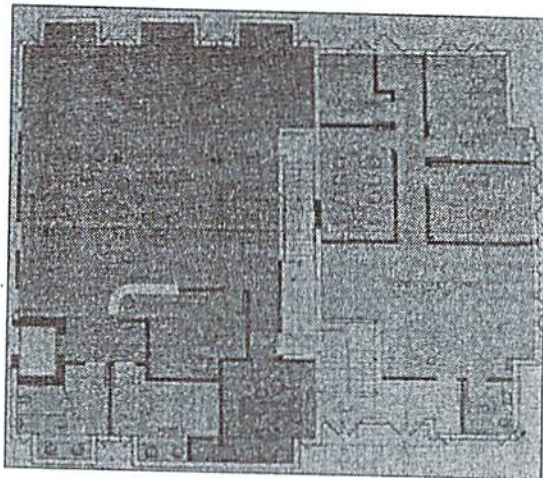
Since June's Special Town Meeting gave authority to decide uses to the Board of Selectmen, Betsy Sullivan and Andre Martecchini heard from both groups on Thursday regarding their needs.

Roberge first outlined the layout of both options, indicating that if the Student Union were to occupy the entire back portion, a lift would need to be installed for handicapped access to the very rear of the building so students and others could move from the lower level to that portion of the building. In the option with the Recreation Department, the lift would not be necessary because they would have a back entrance for accessibility and would not connect to the Union's section in the lower level.

Since the town's Historical Commission deemed the building "significant" one night earlier, Community Preservation Committee Chairwoman Holly Morris said that Community Preservation Act funds could be used for the lift's installation under CPA rules and regulations. The Commission also said that the building is eligible to be registered with the National Registry of Historic Buildings.



In one option, the Student Union would occupy the entire back portion of the Wright Building with separate spaces for middle school and high school students. In another option, the back portion is split, with the Recreation Department office moving into 1,281-square-feet of that section for their offices.





In preparation for March's Annual Town Meeting, Roberge said when selectmen decide the final uses of the building, he can get plans ready and have a reasonable cost estimate to present to voters as to what will be needed for construction.

Steve Jones, president of the Student Union Organization, said that his group clearly preferred the option where they occupied the entire back section of the building, saying a separate space for middle school and high school students was essential. He added that over the past two years, the organization has shown a need for this type of building and that kids will come if given the opportunity and if it is attractive to them.

Debbie Bowen of the Union said that a space for high school students is what necessitated the move for a youth center and that these kids are most in need of a place to go after school.

"A huge population of these kids hang out without supervision at the high school," she said. "We have lots of sports teams, but not every kid makes those teams and this is an at-risk population we want to help out. We're trying to fulfill a need of the community."

Roberge estimated that by removing the back high school lounge space and replacing it with space for the Recreation Department, that means 25 fewer students in that space.

Recreation Department Director Gordon Cushing said that while his organization seems to be "pitted against" the Student Union, that is not so and was never his intention. He discussed the department's various moves over the last 10 years to their current location in the Girl Scout House, where quarters are tight and noise can be an issue with other groups using the location during office hours.

"The Percy Walker Pool, which we manage, is 100 yards away and we do a great deal of business with the schools, so this location makes sense for us," he said.

Cushing added that during times of registration, hundreds of people come into his office so that space is needed, but also offered to share part of a proposed 463-square-foot open office space for his department with the Union as well.

The Student Union's Bob Bostrom said that what's unique about the Wright Building for their needs is that it is in walking distance of the middle and high schools for kids who can't drive elsewhere in town, whereas there are other options to place the Recreation Department, whose programs operate around town.

"Kids can't get to the Senior Center or Tarkiln building, so it's this space or nothing," he said. "How does it make sense to take away space from kids for the Recreation Department?"

Sullivan told Bostrom that there is merely an option of a smaller space with less usage and not an all or nothing option. She said that while the Union has had large events like dances and ski trips, those events would still need to be held off-site for larger groups. Sullivan added that she felt the Union and Recreation Department were compatible as kids also liked to participate in their programs as well.

Jones added that middle school students are a large at-risk group and by helping them today, they will stay active with the Union as high school students, hence the need for their own space.

Martecchini said that there is always the possibility that the Union does so well and is "bursting at the seams" that the town asks the Recreation Department to move once again if they recommend splitting the back portion of the building. Conversely, Martecchini said that if they choose to give the Union the entire portion and it does not work as planned, they could always invite the Recreation Department into the space later.

Concerning a suggestion that selectmen wait on their determination by CPC member George Wadsworth, Sullivan said it would be unfair to the groups awaiting word on space and fundraising to wait any longer.

"I think that we owe it to these folks to make a decision and we need to do that," she said.